

# UNDERSTANDING AND REFLECTION OF ISSUES IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION RESEARCH

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## ABSTRACT

This article discusses issues in social sciences research which serve as an introductory framework of understanding and reflection especially for beginning researchers in the field of English language education. It commences by addressing choices, decisions and factors involved when doing research. These include such variables as power relations, ethical issues, research design, claims to truth in research, and methodological considerations in research. The article ends with the reflection on these issues for carrying out research in Indonesian English language teaching context.

**Keywords:** power relations, ethical issues, claims to truth, methodological orientations

## INTRODUCTION

As future researchers, can students and practitioners in language education just enter an actual research project without adequate theoretical understanding of it. Can they expect that they would understand it while doing the research. If not, what sorts of understanding should they possess. In other words, are there several issues which should be addressed in

order that they are well informed about how and what to carry out research satisfactorily.

The answer to this last question is 'yes', even not only addressed to students, but also to school teachers and lecturers or the academic community at large. This is because theoretical understanding should continue to be developed and refreshed. Consequently, before embarking on a research project, one

should understand some key updated issues which develop around her/his field of specialization, both global and local issues. Global issues involve the development of new or popular trends in social sciences and particularly in language educational research. In addition the intertextual relations of research in the field and other related fields, the interconnection between and among researchers and other stakeholders should be taken into consideration. The local issues include the possibilities of carrying out research in a certain context which may differ depending on the contexts, the means available as well as the constraints which influence the research implementation. All these informing issues are of high contribution for making decisions about doing research.

The discussion is compelling because, as a matter of fact, literature in English language teaching (e.g., articles in *TEFLIN Journal*, '*Indonesian Linguistic Journal*', and many open access national and international journals) has not given a

comprehensive attention on how stakeholders in research should manage each of their power, how ethical issues should be dealt with properly, and how trustworthiness is particularly addressed. Generally informed by social sciences research literature and relevant ELT references, the author highlights the major decisions which researchers are faced with, in relation to power, ethics, truth claims and methodological considerations in research. Based on the highlights, the author then reflects on the issues for carrying out research in Indonesian English language teaching contexts as informed by his professional experience and observation.

## POWER RELATIONS

Power relations are a very controversial construct because it is omnipresent, changeable, reversible, and instable (Obiorah, Olibie, & Wenceslaus, 2010). Foucault (1980, cited in Obiorah et al., 2010), connecting power and knowledge, stated that the relation between power and knowledge is discursive: 'the more power, the more

knowledge; the more knowledge, the more power'. Similarly, Roussel (2005) defines knowledge as a bunch of relations in which power is strongly embedded. In other words, power and knowledge constitute one another. That is, knowledge is not separable from the individuals holding it, but a product of their power relationships. As such, power is persistently negotiated and constructed between participants who may at one time feel powerful and at another time less powerful. When a participant is in a powerful position, he controls and constrains the less powerful counterpart (Anyan, 2013). Research as a process of constructing new knowledge involves various stakeholders, such as researchers, subjects, previous researchers, researcher's institution, and research consumers. In particular, the interplay of power is predominantly essential to consider especially for research that involves human participants as sources of data (Heap 1995, Lather, 1986). Thus, the intensity of power relation in language education research is determined by the choices of research

relational orientations and the decisions that have to be made in all stages of the research process.

In terms of orientations, Cameron, Frase, Harvey, Rampton, & Richardson (1993) offer three choices of power relations a researcher can decide before embarking on research: 'research on', 'research on and for', and 'research on, for and with'. The use of the prepositions (*on*, *for* and *with*) indicates the preferred relation of the researcher to his/her subjects. 'Research on', also called 'ethical research', assumes the subjects as having no interests. The research serves the interest of a mainstream group which the researcher represents. This type of research may bring about negative effects to the researched; therefore, the researcher is strongly recommended to forestall such potential danger. It is worth noting the choice of the term 'ethical research' for the equivalence of 'research on' which seems to bring a paradox to what 'research on' actually means. Perhaps, this choice is to remind researchers of forestalling potential dangerous consequences of such type of

research. 'Research on and for', also labeled as 'advocacy research', defends the interest of the subjects. In this case, their voice is represented by the researcher as the expert. Last, 'research on, for and with' which is also called 'empowerment research' takes into account the personal dignity of the subjects. This means that the research is not only done on and for them, but most importantly with them, by which the researcher addresses their agendas, in addition to the researcher's.

In a similar vein, Zeni (1998) categorizes the researched into four types. First, a 'subject' is observed and no active participation from her/him is needed by a researcher. Second, an 'informant' is aware of giving information to the researcher. Third, a 'participant' is more involved whereby her/his perspective is considered in research. Last, a 'collaborator' is fully involved in planning, implementation and interpretation of data research. The researched as 'subject' or 'informant' as perceived here seems to correspond to 'research on'. The researched as 'participant' suits

'research on and for', while the researched as 'collaborator' corresponds to 'research on, for, and with' as explained by Cameron et al. (1993) above. Zhang (2009) argues that language education should develop empowering research because it not only benefits the researcher, but also the teacher and students as they are taken equally as collaborators.

Furthermore, after a researcher decides the research relational orientation, and especially when the empowering research is taken, he/she is inevitable from the permutation of power that occurs in all stages of research process: participant recruitment, data collection, data analysis, validation, and reporting (Karnieli-Miller, Strier & Pessach, 2009; Das, 2010).

First, Karnieli-Miller et al. (2009) explain that in the initial stage of participant recruitment the researcher has control over the research process, by deciding how to introduce the research to potential participants, how to describe the research goals, and how to disclose institutional affiliations to maximize

cooperation. However, with potentially vulnerable participants, a researcher may face serious challenges. For example, Das (2010), to finally recruit 21 participants, had applied many methods to find ways to advertise the study and elicit participation, including visiting community centers, social organizations, advertising the study in various locales, colleges in and around the city, posting various blogs and discussion posts in a variety of sites aimed at the target audience, and directly approaching many people in the community to obtain help for recruitment. These activities were geared towards building relationships in the community. In other words, Das had experienced some sense of powerlessness during the recruitment stage, especially regarding whether she would be able to recruit participants for her research or not. Similarly, to facilitate acceptance by participants (i.e., teachers and/or students) based in an institution such as schools, a researcher should have written recommendations, support and

permission from various agencies required by law or convention. In Indonesian context, these gatekeepers include the office of social and political affairs, the development planning board, the education office, and the school principal. Such written support adds power to the researcher and positions her/him as one who deserves acceptance within the system (Jazadi, 2008).

Next, in data collection stage, the research success seems to be entirely dependent on the participants' willingness to take part and to share their knowledge with the researcher. To allow for the collection of data with expected quantity and quality, it is argued that the researcher develops strong relationships or rapport with the participants. There are various rapport-building tactics that can be applied by a researcher, but they should be applied with care to prevent them from being interpreted as some type of manipulation to obtain the data needed for the study, while resulting in exposing vulnerabilities not only on the part of the researched but also

the researcher (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009; Das, 2010). When faced with such circumstances, researchers should find ways to cope with.

For example, Ackerly & True (2008), from feminist-informed ethical perspective, describe a researcher who began interviewing vulnerable participants, but stopped doing so when they expressed feelings of insecurity in exposing experiences that if published might lead to their further social marginalization and their own fury at how their previous experience of telling their stories had been used by the authorities. As a result of her pondering on her relationship to her research participants and the impact of her research on them, the researcher changed her research question so that personal interviews with vulnerable women were no longer her main source of data. In her revised research design government officials became more important participants of study.

The other example is Das (2010), who had shared with participants her stories and experiences if they wished to hear them, aiming at

reciprocating the vulnerability and level of the power between the participant and researcher and be able to emphasize with the participant's narrative to express understanding. Nonetheless, the researcher later reconsidered her naive position of self-disclosure, her rights to confidentiality and anonymity, and right to keep personal information, and adjusted her position. Accordingly, the researcher responded to personal questions in a much more controlled way and only encouraged it before or after the interview.

In the stage of data analysis and production of the report, formal control and power over the data returns to the researcher (Gitlin & Russell, 1994; Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009). There are some choices she/he can consider. First, as usually applied in common research reporting, the concern is on research variables. The participants are made invisible, as if there were no power relations. The wordings seem very certainly definitive. Most expressions are made in passive forms. Yet, recently many social and humanities

researchers have started to apply a more interactive reporting style. The research process, such as how a researcher interacts with her/his subjects, is made explicit. The expressions used are also made more tentative, relative to the understanding of the researcher. Such a style is also indicated by the dominant use of active forms and pronouns (Hertz, 1996; Jones 1992; Gitlin & Russell, 1994).

In addition, power relation is more intensified in teacher research which has gained prominence since the last two decades (Zeni, 1998; Stocker, 2012). Teacher research refers to teachers as the agents who conduct the study involving their own students, despite the different orientations taken (Stocker, 2012). In such a research context, students are usually identified as 'vulnerable – especially if their families have little money or education' (Zeni, 1998), a 'relatively captive population' (Moreno, 1998) 'people of a lower social status' (Erickson, 2006), those who 'feel under pressure to give up their free time and take part in an activity that may potentially make

them feel uncomfortable' (Taber (2007), and those who are in 'the dynamic mix of personal ties and multiple social roles, statuses, and purposes' with the teacher who are also the researcher (Stocker, 2012: 55). Thus, although a teacher researcher can pass all research stages successfully, the power relation complexity must be fully taken into account.

Though less discussed, the other salient, form of power relation is between researcher(s) and previous researchers/authors. As can always be discovered in any scholarly paper, even in this one, experts' words have always taken a top-down relation, used to legitimate what the current researcher is claiming. However, there is another option; Jones (1992), from a feminist educational research perspective for instance, argues that other theorists' account can only function as other points of view, not superior to what the researcher discovers.

## **ETHICAL ISSUES**

Ethical issues constitute further implications of power relations

discussed above. The origins of concerns about research ethics are originally found in medical research, but this has broadened to include all research with human subjects (Gallagher, 2005). These issues are related to how researchers ethically treat their subjects and others. Hammersley and Traianou (2012) identify four commonly recognized principles of research ethics, including minimizing harm, respecting autonomy, protecting privacy, offering reciprocity, and treating people with equity. Banister (2007) suggests some key ethical elements when evaluating a research design. First, the researched must be able to provide 'informed consent', meaning that they have been supplied necessary facts to determine if their participation in the study is safe and useful. Second, they must be able to withdraw from the study at any time, without fear of punishments. Third, researchers must ensure to eliminate unnecessary risks in planning their research. Last, the benefits of participants and public in general must outweigh the potential risks of the study.

However, Cocklin (1992) and Borg (2010) observe that while in theory ethical principles are very clearly delineated, in practice researchers often face dilemmas about what to do and which pose ethical questions. These have to do with the choice of research orientations, participants and contexts.

With regards to research orientations, in 'research on' or 'ethical research' whereby the researched is assumed to have no interest, ethical issues have to be given a prime consideration as 'human subjects deserve special ethical consideration' (Cameron et al., 1993). One example of such research is experimental research where the subjects are divided into two groups: the experimental and the control groups. While the experimental group is treated with benefits of new ideas or innovation, the control group is treated with so-called old ordinary practices, therefore receiving no benefits. To overcome the dilemma, Drew (2007) suggests that after the research is complete, the researchers could provide the new innovation program



to the participants in the control group if it is a more effective program.

Ethical issues have also to be addressed in 'advocacy' or even 'empowerment' (Cameron et al., 1993) qualitative research, whereby the participant researcher may directly look into many aspects of the lifestyle of the participants, thus potentially pervading privacy of the researched (Drew, 2007). In this case, personal, sensitive and research data shall be differentiated. Personal data consist of information through which an individual could be identified. 'Sensitive data' means personal data comprising such information the racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or other beliefs, physical or mental condition, and sexual life of the participants. Research data are the aggregates collected as part of the research and only by which a participant cannot be identified. In addition, due to the nature of participant observation, all these kinds of data may be included in the data collected such as via audio or visual recording (Banister, 2007) although they may not be the

main data needed by the researcher. Thus, the researcher has to be able to sort out research data from personal or sensitive data that are not needed in the research. Personal or sensitive data may also be research data and so only those pertinent to the research that may be kept for further use with proper codification to ensure anonymity and confidentiality (University of Nottingham, 2013).

With regards to research participants, ethical issues appear in research involving children under 18 (a beginning legal age in many countries). When the participants are children, the research should obtain informed consent first from the parents or guardians, and when the child has reached the age of 7 or over, an informed assent must be obtained separately from her/him and that the objection of a child at any age should be adhered to unless the intervention being tested brings an important direct benefit to the child's health (Leanai & Olge, 2012).

In relation to research contexts, some ethical questions emerge in teacher research and cross-cultural research. First, to highlight the ethical

challenges faced by researchers who recruit their students as research participants, Stocker (2012) reported a case study about how to get informed consent from her own students in an ESP foreign language classroom in Taiwan. She found that it is appropriate to follow some steps in obtaining students' consent. As a first step, complete information is provided orally and in writing to the participants. Then, allow the students are allowed for delaying consent so that they have time to consider their choices under non-coercive environment. Normally, oral consent about the teacher research general agenda should be obtained first. Afterwards, they may discuss and reflect how each of them may consider herself or himself to participate or not. Finally, when written consent to participate is pursued or submitted, it is recommended that a setting without teacher-student face-to-face contact is used, such as email or postal exchanges. While this method may lower participation rate, it certainly addresses the ethical dilemmas.

Second, in cross cultural research contexts, Marshall and Batten (2003) observe that generally minority groups have come across bad experiences such as prejudice and stereotyping, socioeconomic and career blockage; and struggling to maintain their own ethnic identity while adapting to life in the dominant culture. The academic perspective, despite some theoretical grounding in diversity, remains an extension of the dominant culture's base of largely European Western values, ethics, and norms. Therefore, Marshall and Batten (2003) recommend Participatory Action Research (PAR) be used as the methodology in researching cross-cultural community as it aims to improve the participants' well-being, promote knowledge, and to improve PAR practice through a critical scrutiny of the collaborative process.

In addition, one last issue that often has less attention is 'research deception' (Drew, 2007), 'occluded research' or 'covert research' (University of Nottingham, 2013). This issue pertains to an intentional misrepresentation of information

related to the aim, characteristics, or repercussions of an investigation (Drew, *ibid.*). The code of ethics at the University of Nottingham (*ibid.*) states that the “withholding of information from participants should only occur when the researcher is clear that the aims and objectives of the research cannot be achieved by any other means and that the welfare of the participants is assured.” Researchers’ professional judgments should work to anticipate critical moments while they continue to consult the issues with the research ethic authority in their institution.

### **TRUTH CLAIMS AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The last consideration which informs decision making in doing research has to do with various views on the essence of truth or the status claims of knowledge and the conceptualization of “validity” and ‘reliability’ or ‘trustworthiness’.

Views on the essence of truth are related to the kind of research ‘paradigms’ a researcher embraces. In research literature, paradigms have captured a lot of definitions, which Morgan (2007: 51-54) have

categorized into four, from the broadest to the most specific. The broadest definition views paradigms as worldviews, i.e. the researchers’ thoughts as a basic set of assumptions forming the nature of research and guiding their inquiries. In other words, paradigms as worldviews refer to the influence of individual researchers’ awareness or knowledge on topics researchers chosen to be investigated. Thus, in real life, people may claim truth based on the empirical reality as well logical and normative considerations. In this regard, Heap (1995) proposes two claims of truth in human sciences which differ from ‘empirical inquiries’. The first is termed ‘logical claims’, indicating a necessary relation of at least two conceptual elements in a proposition. The second claim is called ‘normative claims’ which rely for their truth on knowledge agreed upon in a particular community or context. A normative claim, therefore, is a contingent relation which is not a necessary one, as expressed in a logical claim. These two claims of truth are labeled as ‘a priori ones’.

The second definition views paradigms as the best known epistemologies (including realism and constructivism) as separate belief systems that affect how a researcher asks and answers questions. This version assumes that research intrinsically draws in epistemological issues about the nature of knowledge and knowing. Specifically, treating post-positivism and constructivism as paradigms leads to fundamental differences in social scientists' assumptions about the nature of knowledge and the proper ways of producing such knowledge (Morgan, 2007). Kilpatrick (1988) describes three research trends related to different epistemological paradigms which educational practices have applied. The first trend is a quantity-based 'empirical analytical science' which is adopted from natural sciences and has served educational agenda since more than a century ago. It focuses on unpacking 'law-like regularities' that allow one to explain, predict, or control phenomena. Despite its continued domination in social and educational research, quantity-based research has

failed in explaining complex phenomena (Mende, 2005). For example, Woods (2013) finds that a typical statistics-based research offers a fuzzy and obvious hypothesis and ignores a lot of information and so he recommends the use of qualitative research, such as case studies, as an alternative or supplement to explain complex social phenomena. The second trend is called qualitatively 'interpretive understanding' which has entered educational research since the 1980s. It attempts to illuminate educational activities by describing them in ways that would make sense to the participants. The last trend in educational research is a 'critical approach', which argues that 'both school and society need to be freed from manipulation, repression and domination and that the researcher should play an active role in helping to achieve that freedom' (Kilpatrick, 1988: 22). These second and last trends have contributed significantly in language education research within the last two decades as shown in many international professional journals and

publications in the field (Richards, 2009).

The third definition treats an aspect of paradigms as shared beliefs within a community of researchers who agree about which questions are most significant and which procedures are most appropriate to answer the questions. A community of researchers may be defined as that comprising 'practitioners of a scientific specialty' devoted in the same technical literature (Morgan, 2007: 53). For example, in English language teaching, one community of researchers may focus on comprehensively describing of the linguistic nature of language, cognition, and discourse as a basis for informing curriculum contents (Cumming, 1994), while the other research community focuses on the pedagogic aspects including the application of communicative language teaching, classroom dynamics, teacher talks and learner interactivity aiming at optimizing students' mastery of the target language (Richards, 2009).

Finally, paradigms are viewed as model examples that function as

'paradigmatic exemplars' for how research is carried out in a certain field. In fact, there are many books and articles in social sciences that count on concrete examples in illustrating the broader principles they propose. The use of research projects as case studies serving as paradigmatic examples is especially common in descriptions of designs that mix different methods (Morgan, 2007: 54). With the availability of information technology, one can easily find a plethora of research reports from undergraduate to doctoral theses, books and journal articles from universities and publishers around the world. Practically, a lot of researchers would use the examples as resources to form their nature of research and guide their research processes. They would generally stick to particular epistemological stances, but would pragmatically adopt the epistemology examples that match their research needs.

After understanding the various definitions of paradigms and their derivations to claims of truth, one has to consider ways to achieve

reliability and validity or trustworthiness in research. In quantitative empirical research, reliability refers to the replicability or repeatability of results or observations, while validity refers to the construct as the beginning concept, notion, problem or hypothesis that arranges which data is to be collected and how it is to be collected (Golafshani, 2003). However, these notions of validity and reliability do not apply in qualitative social research, and so qualitative research experts have developed a set of criteria to achieve 'trustworthiness'. Lincoln & Guba's (1985, cited in and added by Loh, 2013) have developed trustworthiness criteria and techniques for establishing them, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1  
Criteria and Techniques for achieving trustworthiness in qualitative research

Criteria	Techniques
credibility (internal validity)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• prolonged engagement</li> <li>• persistent observation</li> <li>• triangulation (sources, methods, investigators)</li> <li>• peer debriefing</li> <li>• negative case analysis</li> <li>• referential adequacy (archiving of data)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• member checks</li> <li>• peer validation</li> <li>• user validation</li> <li>• thick description</li> </ul>
transferability (external validity)	
dependability (reliability)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• overlap methods (triangulation of methods)</li> <li>• dependability audit (examining the process of the inquiry; how data was collected and kept)</li> </ul>
confirmability (objectivity)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• confirmability audit (examining the product to attest that the findings, interpretations and recommendations are supported by data).</li> </ul>
All criteria above	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a reflexive journal (about self &amp; method)</li> </ul>

These criteria and techniques have appeared to be a consensus up to the present as they continue to be mentioned mainstream qualitative literature (e.g., Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Patton, 2002; Maxwell, 2005; Maxwell, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2011; as cited in Loh, 2013).

## REFLECTION: DOING LANGUAGE EDUCATION RESEARCH IN INDONESIA

Having gone through the series of literature, I now describe some issues in carrying out research in Indonesian regional contexts, by

using the English language education context of West Nusa Tenggara Province as a sample which I have adequately observed for more than 10 years in my position as an English lecturer and researcher. People involved in language education research would include university lecturers, postgraduate students, school teachers and completing undergraduate students whose disciplinary background is language or language education. University lecturers would do research as part of their regular career development. School teachers used to be obliged to do research as part of their career promotion to senior teacher position of IV/B, but are beginning to be obliged to include their action research report or publications in every proposal of their rank promotion. Postgraduate students, who are still small in number in the region, are obliged to write theses for completing their Masters studies, and undergraduate students who form the majority of university student population in West Nusa Tenggara are required to write theses before graduating. It is important to

mention all these potential researchers as they are the ones the targets of this article. However, this reflection is not comprehensive, but is generally represented by a typical case in each of some salient issues of global and national research trends, power relations, ethical issues and claims to truth in research.

First, potential researchers should follow global and national trends in language education research. Though West Nusa Tenggara is relatively far from centers of world publications, with the availability of the internet, potential researchers can access latest findings and research through online academic journals, such as *ELT Journal* (Oxford University Press), *TESOL Journal Quarterly* (TESOL Org.), *English Teaching Forum* (US Embassy), *TESL-EJ*, *Internet-TESL Journal*, *Asian EFL Journal Quarterly*, *TESOL Journal*, *Asian ESP Journal*, *Linguistics Journal*, and foreign national journals including *Philippines ESL Journal*, *Iranian EFL Journal*, *Language in India* and *Chinese EFL Journal* – all of them published by Times Taylor International or its

sister publishers, besides *RELC Journal* and *Anthology Series* (SEAMEO RELC). In addition, online e-books and research reports from British Council are also very useful resources for researchers in West Nusa Tenggara. At the national level, accredited journals such as *TEFLIN Journal* (TEFLIN.Org), *Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching* (Unika Atma Jaya), and *Indonesian Linguistic Journal* (MLI) are representative resources, in addition to many newly emerging open access university-based journals. All these publications are generally available online free of charge, by covering issues even more than the last ten years. Therefore, trends of language education research can easily be mapped. What needs to be done is to inform potential researchers in the region about the importance of accessing these resources and for educational institutions to have secure internet connections. It should be noted that the cost of internet connection is getting more competitive following the success of Indonesian Telecom Company in installing fiber optic cables along all

national roads in the region, as well as private cellular phone companies that allow even isolated areas in the region to have internet connections.

From the various resources, for example, we can see that there is a trend in language teaching in the world, though it has been frowned upon at the national level since recently, about internationalization of schools whereby English is used as the medium of instruction for math, sciences and some other subjects (*e.g.*, see Coleman 2011; Bax 2010; Hadisantosa 2010). This entails that English learning should be targeted not only to English teacher trainees but also other teachers and teacher trainees specializing in other subjects. Moreover, due to the high demand English-competent graduates and the status of English as a global language, English teaching and learning should be oriented to real-life-based mastery of English whereby students learn English through a variety of exposure including using the internet for meeting international friends and other resources, building networks with tourist resorts and centers, and



being committed to joining English camps or living temporarily in English villages that require English as the language of interaction (Jazadi *et al.*, 2012; Solihin, 2012; Jalaluddin, 2012). In other words, English language, which is traditionally a rote-learned subject, has emerged as a living language used as a tool of daily communication and interaction in places usually associated with English as a foreign language.

Second, regarding the issue of power relations, researchers in West Nusa Tenggara are still generally dominated by a traditional view of power relations that the stakeholder having the only power in research is the researcher. Consequently, although a lot of the researchers are involved in classroom action research as it is obliged especially for school teachers, the research is simplified as 'research on' whereby teachers do the research because they need it for their job promotion (so they feel powerless in front of the government); they do it without proportional consent and involvement of the students. Generally the action research projects

undertaken involve pre-testing and post-testing through which students' scores can be manipulated to satisfy the expectations of supervisors and superiors. Thus, the so-called action research becomes tastelessly empiricist and numerical, far from being 'research on, for, and with', which is emancipatory. Therefore, the teachers, as well as many university lecturers, should be awakened to fully comprehend the core mission of classroom action research, that is:

*"...to identify problematic situations or issues considered by participants to be worthy of investigation in order to bring about critically informed changes in practice. Action research is underpinned by democratic principles in that the ownership of change is invested in those who conduct the research (Burns 2009: 20)".*

In other words, there is a complex issue of power relations among education authorities, teachers as researchers and students. That is, teachers who should share their power with their research participants (i.e., students) fail to do

so, while they release all their power to the education authorities whom they are supposed to report administratively, rather than professionally. Thus, the strengthening of teachers' position as valued professionals is an important agenda prior to their involvement as researchers.

Third, ethical issues are never addressed explicitly in education research projects in the region. I observe that no university or college has included ethical issues in their research policies and guidebooks. Several researchers with doctorates and who hold important positions in the regional colleges and universities mainly specialize in pure or applied linguistics and so they are not fully conversant with humanity research. On the other hand, it is inevitable that most of their students, generally those doing undergraduate research, focus on educational research with school students or parents as participants. For this reason, socialization about the urgency of the consideration of ethical issues in research involving human participants such as students should

be taken as an institutional policy by colleges, universities, as well as education offices that oversee teachers' research. More importantly, the Ministry of Education and Culture, especially the Directorate General of Higher Education, would need to revise the 'Implementation Guide of Research and Community Service in Higher Education' (2013) to include a section of ethical standards that should be followed by researchers in higher education institutions.

Fourth, pertaining to claims to truth in research, most researchers still tend to see their research as part of their job requirement that has no real contribution to knowledge. Every teacher is required to produce action research, every lecturer produces research reports regularly, every university student writes a thesis before graduating, but almost none of them are published nor even fully critically read by the supervisor or the examiner. Thousands of the academic works are kept in the respective college or university libraries, generally not treated as sources of valued truth or

knowledge, but as sources of plagiarizing. That is, many students copy, paste and edit some parts of previous theses of other researchers to be presented as their own. Hence, research validity and reliability that are tested generally statistically serve as sweeteners in the generally quantitative-oriented research. This practice should be cut by promoting qualitative research whereby the tendency for manipulation can be minimized. Furthermore, lecturers, university students, and even school teachers should collaborate in handling qualitative research that responds to the need for improving educational quality. Each of the researchers takes a relevant angle of the research to meet their respective needs such as writing a thesis or a research report for a sponsor and a supervisor. More importantly, every research work should be published at least electronically, which is efficient. With the taking effect of the Circular Letter of the Director General of Higher Education (2012), that every student (undergraduate, master or doctorate) has to publish her or his work in a journal prior to graduation,

there should be no more reason for higher education institutions not to facilitate their students to publish their research. One of its ways is by condensing their thesis into a journal article format so it can be published at least in the respective institution electronic journals (especially for the undergraduates whereby accreditation status of the journals does not matter). A lot of (but not all) big education universities in Indonesian have begun to do this, let alone the smaller ones, but the prospect is promising. Such electronic publications are likely to bring a very positive effect to the dissemination and promotion of knowledge and to the prevention of plagiarism. Indonesian Education Minister's Decree on prevention of plagiarism in academic practices can be upheld through observing the publications.

## **CONCLUSION**

The author has discussed choices, decisions and related factors which face researchers in coping with a research agenda. Some different viewpoints on the methodological

aspects have also been reviewed. Therefore, it is expected that language education researchers in Indonesia have sufficient shared awareness which enables them to strengthen their research agenda, by figuring out their position as a stakeholder and the position of the research within the national and international trends.

The writer's reflection about conducting research in Indonesia, especially in West Nusa Tenggara educational context, is admittedly not thorough yet, but shows the complexity of the challenges for doing research that responds to the need for improving educational quality in the region. It may still be a long way for most researchers in the region to produce credible research. However, with the availability of the information technology or the internet and the requirement for university graduates to publish their academic work in journals in conjunction with the strengthening of anti-plagiarism regulation, the development of the humanity and action-based research to the right

track is believed to meet its momentum in a foreseeable future.

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